

# The Builder.

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**OKING** journalists, jovially jesting, with reference to the Sixth Report of the Metropolitan Improvement Commissioners, just published, which makes the erection of a suitable Record Office a *little* more probable than it was before, have pointed out that it was on the 2nd of November, 1647, that the idea of erecting a general repository for the public records was first enunciated; and that it would be a coincidence "pretty to observe" if the question were finally settled just two centuries afterwards, which, aforesaid journalists think, would be a very fair allowance of time for official deliberation.

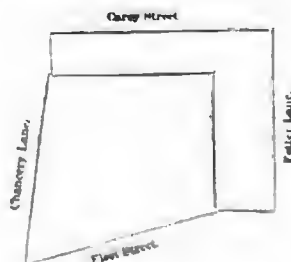
A very fair allowance indeed, considering, too, that all that time our national archives, of which we make so much use and pretend to be so proud, have been running risks to which no ordinarily careful tradesman would think, for five minutes, of exposing his vellum'd records of Mrs. Serewentight's consumption of his fresh butter, or Mr. Jones's order of grindstones and rolling-pins. We have, indeed, a singular way of taking care of what we prize,—an open shed in the Essex marshes," says another diurnal writer, "the Hertford powder-mills, the magazine at the Tower, no moiety of a building the other half of which is devoted to the fabrication of fireworks or gun-cotton,—these are the chosen spots in which Englishmen deposit the printed or written wisdom of their forefathers, which in the abstract they are constantly bespattering with praise. If the records, like human beings, were open to infectious disease, they would be summarily despatched, for security's sake, to Burying-ground-passage, Johnson's-place, Gee's-court, or some of those favoured localities in which Government are determined to receive the cholera, if it shall unfortunately visit the metropolis, with suitable honours. As this cannot be, we have selected the two next most suitable agents of destruction in order to get rid of our records with as little delay as possible,—gunpowder and mildew. In the Tower, one portion of these luckless documents is submitted to the former, in the Queen's Mews to the latter, agency. We may regret that the second chemical process is slow, but it has this superiority over the means of destruction employed at the Tower,—that it is sure. On the other hand, although we may often have occasion to reflect with pain on the immunity from damp enjoyed by the Rolls in the Tower, there is the counterbalancing consideration, that at any given hour of the day or night the whole collection may be launched into eternity by an explosion of the magazine."

Alas, for the veracity of our future histories, if such were the case, the questioning of titles, and the want of materials for coming antiquaries to ramage! And yet, though a period of two hundred years is a fair allowance for deliberation (about a sixth of the whole time that has elapsed since we left our skins and took to living like Christians), the thing is not done, it is merely made possible.

The report relates to two matters,—a site for the proposed Record Office (the size and plan

of it incidentally) and the formation of a new grand blue of communication between the eastern and western divisions of the metropolis. Mr. Pennethorne, Mr. R. L. Jones, and Mr. Henry Cole, are the witnesses whose evidence is given, and four plans are appended, namely:—No. 1. Plan of the Rolls Estate and other properties in the neighbourhood, showing how they will be affected by the erection of the proposed Public Record Office, and by public improvements; No. 2. Plan showing a main central thoroughfare from the eastern to the western quarters of London, suggested in connection with the proposed new Record Office on the Rolls Estate; No. 3. Plan showing the proposed arrangement of the ground floor of the new Record Office; and No. 4. Plan showing the proposed arrangement of the first floor of the new Record Office.

The site pointed out for the office would be bounded on the west by Chancery-lane, widened; on the north by an extension of Carey-street, 60 feet wide, made part of the new thoroughfare; on the east by Fetter-lane, moved easterly, and made 60 feet wide; and on the south by Fleet-street.



The plan of the building as proposed takes the shape of a reversed L, the horizontal arm being next Carey-street: St. Dunstan's Church, Clifford's Inn, and Sergeant's Inn, occupy the remainder of the ground circumscribed by the roads named.

The building is to be Elizabethan (we hear it with misgivings), built of brick, with a long series of bay windows, and to cost 175,000*l.*, exclusive of fixtures and fittings, which would be 31,500*l.* more. It would be two stories in height, and contain 141 rooms, besides a basement which might be afterwards appropriated. Provision would be made, too, for adding a third story when required. There would be fire-places in every room, and no wood-work throughout the building. The cost of properties for the site, beyond those in possession, and after taking credit for various matters, is estimated at 109,107*l.*, and the net cost to the public, of extending Carey-street across Chancery-lane and the Rolls Estate to Fetter-lane, and of diverting and widening Fetter-lane from such proposed extension of Carey-street to Fleet-street, 112,908*l.*

The new main line of communication now proposed by Mr. Pennethorne, proceeds eastward from Long-acre, at the corner of Bow-street, diverges towards the south into Carey-street, Lincoln's-inn, thus forming an ugly and awkward angle with Long-acre, traverses the north side of the Rolls Estate into Fetter-lane, and proceeds thence by a bridge over Farringdon-street; passes by the Sessions House, Old Bailey, between that and Newgate prison, takes down part of Paternoster-row, and so comes out at the west end of Cheapside.

The line suggested by Mr. Pennethorne in 1834 (no one can say this has been buried, although denied the *mature* reflection of two

centuries given to the record office), proceeding from nearly the same point in Long Acre, kept north of his present line, and would have passed along the south side of Lincoln's-inn-fields, and through New-square, close to the end of the new hall; then crossing Chancery-lane, and the north end of Farringdon-street, would have terminated at the west end of Newgate-street. The benches of the "Inn," however, and the trustees of the "Fields," threatened opposition, and the line has been kept to the south to avoid the forbidden ground.

By making this deviation, the office-of-works surveyor has fallen into a line proposed by the city surveyor, Mr. Bunning, who has complained in a letter to the *Times* of the treatment he has received, both from Mr. Pennethorne and the Metropolitan Improvement Commissioners themselves. In this communication he very justly objects to crooked lines, and points to the sinuosities of Gresham-street, in support of his protest.

He might have mentioned Endell-street, too, at the end of Bow-street, the point of commencement for the new line, where (although the houses at the corner, which prevented the road from Bow-street continuing straight on, actually fell down), an awkward turn was positively created, and a coachmaker's manufactory, an imposing pile of the sort, by the way, is now rising to shut out all hopes of a remedy for years to come.

The line in the main, however, must be generally approved of; and the commissioners conclude their report by saying, they are of opinion, that "if measures be adopted by the Government for the erection of" a record office, such portion of the proposed line as is included in the estimate we have given, should at the same time be executed: and they think it their duty to add, that the general line of communication proposed "is (irrespective of the special advantage of erecting an office for the records of the kingdom on the site suggested) the most eligible and practicable line for connecting the eastern and western portions of the metropolis, and that it would very advantageously increase the facilities of communication within the same."

We should say, that the plan shows a new street, branching from the Strand at the eastern corner of Brydges-street, in a north-easterly direction till it meets the new line, and another from the north side of St. Clement's Church. Opposite to the first there is also a proposed street subtending to Holborn, partly formed by the western roadway of Lincoln's-inn-fields, and Gate-street, widened. At the corner of Fetter-lane, in Holborn, there is a street in a south-easterly direction, meeting the new main line near Shoe-lane, and a corresponding street from the corner of the new

Mr. Bunning had been named by the party in question, as a connecting party, and he therefore writes:—"I do not state for myself that I know nothing of the proceedings, and would be glad to learn through you why my evidence, as the officer of the corporation, who is expected to carry out a considerable portion of the street, was not required before the committee. It differs from that of Mr. Pennethorne in that it is comparatively a straight line, and in all my reports to the committee I were most strongly the desirability of having all connected with the line, and the line, happy for my recommendations, maintain itself but too faintly in the 'sinuosities' of Gresham-street; and, in reference to this street, I may be allowed to state that when the improvements were laid out, I have before I anticipated filling the handsome office I now hold, I visited as the architect of the Metropolitan Company in connection with the matter, Mr. Editham, in Mr. Richard Jones, and suggested improvements in connection with the line, and the line, which were subsequently rejected, but which I cannot help thinking would in a great degree have saved the street which you, in connection with, these who use the street, justly set upon it."

To go back to the new line of street, I have just reason to complain of the way in which I have been treated, and Mr. Leeson there is too far from home: he has original plans, different materially from mine, bearing obviously north-eastward, and terminating at the west end of Newgate-street, which my line passed direct from Carey-street with a slight curve, Farringdon-street, through the vacant space between the Sessions House and Newgate prison, and terminated at the west end of Chancery-lane. Mr. Pennethorne, however, has adopted a portion of my line, discarded the remainder, and published the whole at the end of May last as his own, dating it back January 31, 1847, while I can remember that in the last of April 1847, my plan took the direction above described. There is but too much to be said of the committee, who are not only unwilling to do the advantage of a straight line, but are a connecting party, as has been stated, to the proposed street."